

TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING

WISCONSIN'S JOURNEY TO COLLEGE AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS

AUGUST 2013



PREFACE

This report is being submitted pursuant to the requirements of 2013 Wisconsin Act 20, the 2013-15 biennial budget. As required by Act 20, this report is to be submitted to the speaker of the Assembly and the president of the Senate, the governor, and, if applicable, a legislative study committee established under provisions of the budget bill.

THE MOVE TO COLLEGE AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS IN WISCONSIN

Academic standards are a set of expectations for what students should know and be able to do in kindergarten through 12th grade. Under the authority granted to the State Superintendent under Article X of the Wisconsin Constitution, Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers adopted the internationally-benchmarked Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Mathematics and English Language Arts on June 2, 2010. Wisconsin also adopted Standards for Literacy in All Subjects. These standards articulate expected knowledge and skills in English Language Arts and Mathematics at each grade level, and provide the foundation for rigorous education that will ultimately prepare all students to graduate from high school ready for success in college and career.

While academic standards establish what students need to learn, standards do not dictate how teachers should teach, and are not a curriculum. The CCSS inform the work of teachers in the classroom and help support parents' understanding of what their children should know and be able to do at each grade level in order to be college and career ready. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others decide how the CCSS are to be met. Throughout Wisconsin classrooms, local educators continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to meet the individual needs of the students in their classrooms, and local school boards continue to adopt a curriculum that best meets the needs of their local community.

EARLY WORK TO IMPROVE STATE STANDARDS

Before the adoption of the CCSS in 2010, the expectations for student knowledge and skills were based on Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards, first adopted in 1998. However, recognizing the need for more rigorous and clear standards that were aligned to postsecondary and workforce expectations, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) began to examine the need for updating Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards as early as 2006. To facilitate this critical endeavor, DPI began to engage a variety of local, state, and national partners.

As the first step in Wisconsin's effort to update Wisconsin's educational standards, DPI convened a Summit for 21st Century Skills (Summit) in March 2007, in partnership with Competitive Wisconsin, Inc. (Appendix A). The Summit sought feedback and consultation from business, commerce, workforce, and higher education leaders to define the knowledge and skills most important for growing an educated and prepared Wisconsin workforce. Consistently, business leaders participating in the Summit cited real-world skills like flexibility, adaptability, communication, collaboration, and problem solving as being most important for their employees, as well as skills like writing for multiple audiences, and verbal communication. The clear message from state business leaders was that Wisconsin needed to examine and revise the 1998 Model Academic Standards to ensure these skills necessary for our state's future workforce were present.

Following the 2007 Summit, DPI partnered with the American Diploma Project Network, a 35-state network through Achieve (Appendix B) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Appendix C) to convene a task force charged with examining Wisconsin's 1998 Model

Academic Standards to assess their college and career readiness (Appendix D). The task force, comprised of educators, legislators, parents, and business representatives, found the 1998 standards outdated for the demands of today. Among the most significant critiques was that the 1998 standards were written only at grades 4, 8, and 12. As a result, districts had to fill in the gaps for all of the other grades – a costly process that took significant staff time. The 1998 standards suffered from being a mile wide and an inch deep, lacking clarity and focus.

To address the outdated standards, the task force recommended revision of the 1998 Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics and called for:

- Identifying essential standards for classroom instruction and assessment and developing grade-by-grade level expectations;
- Integrating 21st century skills (e.g. collaboration, communication, flexibility, and adaptability) and making strong connections across subjects and disciplines;
- Aligning assessments with standards and developing a meaningful system of accountability that is comprehensive, varied, and authentic;
- Facilitating high school students' transition to postsecondary, credit-bearing coursework;
- Providing professional development and creating a portal of resources for teachers and those planning curriculum; and
- Involving postsecondary teacher education and content faculty (Appendix D).

As a result of these recommendations, DPI convened English Language Arts and Mathematics leadership teams and began the standards revision process in 2008 (Appendix E). As part of the partnership with the American Diploma Project Network, these drafts were subject to a rigorous quality review process to ensure that Wisconsin's efforts were aligned to national and international benchmarks for success in college and careers. These benchmarks included the knowledge and skills required for successful entry into credit-bearing courses and quality jobs.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CCSS

In 2009, midway through Wisconsin's standards revision process, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) initiated a state-led discussion around creating a common set of college and career ready benchmarks for Mathematics and English Language Arts.¹ According to NGA and CCSSO, the point of this effort is "to improve teaching and learning to ensure that high school graduates in every part of the nation have the knowledge and skills they need for a college or career." Further, if students meet these new rigorous and clear standards "they will have better choices in their lives and the nation will be more competitive in today's global economy."²

Additional arguments in support of this concept emerged. In a time of tightening state budgets, state governors and education chiefs recognized the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of each state having widely varying expectations for students in English Language Arts and Mathematics. National organizations such as the Fordham Foundation, routinely criticized Wisconsin and other states for having academic standards that were considered to be far less rigorous than those in other states and for "setting the bar far too low and leaving a content and expectations gap between schools and classrooms."³ In addition, significantly divergent state standards were problematic for an increasingly mobile population, including children of military families.

¹ See <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/process> for more information on this process.

² "Summary of Public Feedback on the Draft College and Career-Readiness Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics", Common Core State Standards Initiative

³ <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-daily/common-core-watch/2013/a-testimony-on-the-common-core-standards.html>

This multi-state discussion among state governors and education chiefs was similar to the statewide discussion Wisconsin and other states were already convening with stakeholders at the state level. Thirty-five states had already joined the American Diploma Project Network, thereby committing to meet common benchmarks of college and career readiness. As NGA and CCSSO began their work together on behalf of state governors and state chiefs, they were able to leverage the work already in progress in states like Wisconsin.

On June 1, 2009, Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle and State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster signed a joint memorandum of understanding (MOU) indicating that Wisconsin would partner with NGA and CCSSO in a state-led process to create higher and clearer standards that were internationally benchmarked (Appendix F). These standards would be specific but not prescriptive and most importantly, would prepare students for college and careers. The MOU established Wisconsin's role as a part of this process but did not commit Wisconsin to adopting the standards. Wisconsin would participate as a full partner in the process of drafting and revising the CCSS, but Wisconsin would reserve the right to make an educated decision about adopting them as the process unfolded.

This opportunity to work collaboratively with education partners in other states to develop the CCSS came at the right time. Wisconsin's English Language Arts and Mathematics leadership teams had spent the past year working on standards revisions, and had developed a blueprint to improve Wisconsin's standards to meet college and career readiness goals. In July 2009, the blueprint received praise from Achieve's American Diploma Project Network (Appendix G), previously a critic of Wisconsin standards. Achieve found that the draft standards "present student-learning expectations that are intellectually demanding" and were "well aligned" with

college and career benchmarks established by the American Diploma Project (Appendix G.2). The national organization further commended Wisconsin for its “comprehensive standards revision process” (Appendix G.2). Perhaps most importantly, this blueprint provided state education leaders with a clear guide of what Wisconsin stakeholders wanted and needed to see in any set of standards adopted.

As the state-led effort around a common, core set of English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards began to take shape through NGA and CCSSO, each state participated in the effort in different ways. The CCSS were written by expert teams constructed through a collaborative statewide nomination process. Since Wisconsin had already spent significant time working on revisions to its own standards before the multi-state initiative that led to CCSS, Wisconsin actively participated in the CCSS drafting/revising process while maintaining perspective on whether the CCSS standards would meet Wisconsin’s needs.

DPI reviewed multiple drafts of the CCSS often using leadership teams of Wisconsin standards experts to provide valuable feedback that was then incorporated in subsequent drafts. In March 2010, DPI partnered with over ten Wisconsin education professional associations, which included representatives from higher education, administration, school boards, teachers, and parents, to host a day-long conference focused on generating feedback on the CCSS draft and discussing Wisconsin’s opportunity to adopt these standards when released (Appendix H). The participants agreed that the CCSS were higher, clearer and provided the much needed specificity Wisconsin’s current standards were lacking.

In March 2010, the CCSS were released for a three week period of public feedback, in which

states sought insights from parents, educators, community members, and the public. Citizens from throughout Wisconsin responded with significant feedback (Appendix I). The comments were largely positive and focused more on specific details that could be addressed to further refine and improve the CCSS. Many suggested changes were specifically mentioned by the Common Core State Standards Initiative in their summary of public feedback, released in late spring 2010 (Appendix I.2).

The Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics were finalized and released in June 2010. To date, 45 states, which includes Wisconsin, the District of Columbia, and four territories have adopted both the English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards, and one additional state, Minnesota, has adopted the English Language Arts Standards. In addition to broad support among K-12 education organizations, numerous local, state, and national business, military, higher education, and parent organizations have offered their support of the standards, including the following:

- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce,
- The Business Roundtable,
- The Partnership for 21st Century Skills,
- The Business-Higher Education Forum,
- The Association of American Colleges and Universities,
- The State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO),
- The Military Child Education Coalition,
- The United States Army, and
- The National PTA.

As Wisconsin was among the earliest adopters of the standards, Wisconsin elected officials and policymakers have also supported the CCSS in various ways since their adoption over three years ago. For example, 2011 Wisconsin Act 32, the 2011-13 biennial budget act, explicitly required the DPI to replace the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination, which measured the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards, with new pupil assessments that measured mastery of the Common Core Standards. Throughout 2011, the Governor's Read to Lead Task Force, chaired by Governor Scott Walker and vice-chaired by State Superintendent Tony Evers, discussed ways to dramatically improve reading outcomes in the state, with the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts as the underpinning of that work. In January 2012, the Wisconsin Read to Lead Task Force Recommendations affirmed the state's commitment to the CCSS and included a recommendation that DPI review and update Wisconsin's Model Early Learning Standards to ensure alignment of early childhood learning standards with the CCSS in grades K-12. According to the Task Force's final report,

*Many in our state may not realize how far we have fallen relative to the nation as a whole because our standards have been set so low. In response to the need to improve state standards and create a common set of expectations for children across the country, Wisconsin was among the first of 48 states and territories to adopt the Common Core State Standards, a set of rigorous new standards that are benchmarked against the standards of high performing countries. These standards create a common set of expectations for children across the country. As Wisconsin implements and assesses student performance against the more rigorous new standards, parents, students, and educators must be prepared for this demanding change.*⁴

⁴ See <http://walker.wi.gov/Documents/Read.pdf> for the full Read to Lead Task Force Report.

LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CCSS

In a local control state like Wisconsin, the state's 424 local school districts determine how to design curriculum to meet the CCSS. Typically, the state partners with stakeholder groups to provide resources to assist districts in their local implementation efforts. No aspect of state level support is mandatory; all tools, resources, and documents are designed to be customized and used locally.

Wisconsin's districts began modifying their curricula to meet the CCSS in 2010. DPI partnered with the 12 Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESAs) to create a foundational training offered in all CESAs to administrators, schools boards, teacher teams and stakeholders. This foundational training, focused on improving understanding of CCSS, was rolled out across the state throughout the 2010-11 school year. With the success of this training approach, CESAs designed deeper investigation training for English Language Arts and Mathematics teacher teams in 2011-12. These trainings have been conducted throughout the state, and have been modified over time and offered to administrators, teachers of English language learners and special education students, and pre-service educators, among others.

To support the CCSS initiative, DPI has reallocated resources to create a Common Core State Standards team that provides support to local school districts implementing the CCSS. This team is charged with creating and communicating about literacy and mathematics resources districts may use to assist them in implementing rigorous CCSS-aligned English Language Arts and Mathematics courses. Local districts are free to use these resources or any resources that assist

them in implementing higher standards. In the past year, the CCSS team has provided technical assistance and professional learning in every CESA and to hundreds of public and private school educators, stakeholder groups, and citizens.

In May 2013, Wisconsin was recognized by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) as having created exemplary resources that other states could potentially benefit from. To date, Wisconsin has been recognized as a national leader in promoting literacy in all content areas, in creating a comprehensive website, providing outreach, communicating about alternate assessments, developing online professional learning, and developing creative statewide partnerships (Appendix L).

Wisconsin was selected by the College and Career Readiness Partnership to join a consortium of seven states to form the College Readiness Partnership, a statewide collaborative leadership team with members from DPI, CESAs, the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), and Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU) to work on the alignment of the CCSS to college and career training programs, college entrance, and college placement decision-making. Recommendations from this group were presented to partner leaders Jesse Harness (CESA), Kevin Reilly (UW System), Morna Foy (WTCS), Rolf Wegenke (WAICU), and State Superintendent Tony Evers (DPI) on May 15, 2013 (Appendix K). The leaders charged the group to take further action to achieve these recommendations. Recently, this collaborative group was awarded a grant from the College and Career Readiness Partnership to implement these joint recommendations.

To date, local school districts have been working for three full years to prepare for and implement new, higher Wisconsin standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics as part of a phased rollout plan developed collaboratively with education stakeholders (Appendix M). In September 2011, the DPI published guidance documents to assist local districts in understanding the CCSS and how to transition to teaching them (Appendix N and O). Districts have done significant work to implement the CCSS. For example, the Milwaukee Public School system has developed its Comprehensive Literacy Plan and Comprehensive Mathematics and Science Plan, including curriculum guides and pacing guides based on the CCSS and has conducted numerous professional development opportunities for principals and teachers.

As local districts continue their work to implement the CCSS, the positive response from a variety of education stakeholders continues. There is strong collaboration and enthusiasm among state, regional, and local education agencies and educators. Administrators are more able to focus their limited budgets on teaching and learning, as opposed to writing and revising district specific grade-by-grade learning targets as was necessary with the previous standards. Since a common language now exists to discuss grade level expectations, educators are increasingly able to share resources and best practices with peers across the state and nation. Efforts to provide resources online are growing, such as an online literacy educator community, and the opportunity to share curriculum scope and sequence ideas through a growing statewide online resource portal. The virtual opportunities for educators to share ideas and improve their practice will only be improved through the legislature's funding for these efforts in the 2013-15 biennial budget.

In addition to support from educators, parents have more access than ever to clear, concise information about what their children are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level, and additional resources to support that learning at home. For example, the National PTA developed parent-friendly informational pamphlets about the CCSS for parents to use when they attend parent-teacher conferences for children at every grade level. If that same family moves to a nearby district or to another state, their children will meet similar expectations and be learning similar knowledge and skills.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CCSS

2011 Wisconsin Act 32, the 2011-13 biennial budget act, required DPI to replace the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) with new pupil assessments that measured mastery of the CCSS. Subsequently, 2013 Wisconsin Act 20, the 2013-15 biennial budget act, provided the funding for the state's new assessment system that will measure mastery of these standards. The new assessments will measure how all students can demonstrate the expected CCSS skills and knowledge, regardless of how individual school districts choose to get students to meet these expectations. DPI has encouraged educators, parents, school board members, and administrators to access these test items to better understand the rigor and relevance of this new assessment well before students take the test for the first time in 2014-15.

To maximize efficiency and maximize resources across states, Wisconsin joined a consortium of states that are working together to develop a common assessment aligned to the CCSS. This

assessment, the SMARTER/Balanced Assessment,⁵ is currently being piloted in a number of schools throughout Wisconsin to gain important mid-project feedback. Through 2013 Wisconsin Act 20, Wisconsin has also committed to replacing the 10th grade WKCE with the ACT suite of assessments. These exams are aligned to the CCSS and provide a further measure of college and career readiness. As a result of these efforts, Wisconsin will have a new assessment system that will be more rigorous than the current WKCE test, will be computer-based adaptive, and will provide much faster feedback to educators, students, and parents.

The CCSS-aligned assessments form the foundation of two major efforts to transform education and ensure every Wisconsin child graduates ready for college and career: Wisconsin's new statewide accountability and educator evaluation systems. These initiatives, aimed at improving outcomes and accountability for performance, were established in collaboration with Governor Walker and members of the Legislature over the past three years. In other words, Wisconsin's new, internationally-benchmarked college and career standards will drive the teaching and learning that will be measured through Wisconsin's assessment, accountability, and educator evaluation systems.

CONCLUSION

Over the past three years, Wisconsin has advanced several major reform efforts to improve teaching, learning, leading, and accountability for every child to graduate college and career

⁵ Sample items from the SMARTER assessment are public (See <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/>).

ready. The scope and the pace of the change are unprecedented, and the CCSS are the foundation upon which all of the change is built.

Among the overwhelming majority of states and territories that helped to create and subsequently adopted the CCSS, each state has a different adoption story and each has a different implementation story. In Wisconsin:

- Diverse groups of Wisconsin stakeholders agreed as early as 2007 that new standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics were necessary.
- Before the CCSS were ever conceived, Wisconsin had convened state-level teams to begin the process of re-writing new English Language Arts and Mathematics standards.
- The state-led effort for CCSS came along at the right time for Wisconsin, allowing the state to maximize that work that had been done locally with the work that was being done across states.
- The final draft of the CCSS contained standards that were higher, clearer and more specific, Wisconsin teachers, superintendents, parents and business leaders were specifically seeking these three changes.
- DPI reviewed the standards, provided feedback, and engaged the public and education partners in collaborative planning and decision-making around support for the standards.
- On June 2, 2010, State Superintendent Tony Evers adopted the CCSS (Appendix J), as a foundational component of college and career readiness for all Wisconsin students.
- Since June 2010, schools and districts have been working to develop instruction based on the CCSS for students and communities alike, and new assessments that measure mastery of the CCSS will come online in the 2014-15 school year.

Districts, schools, teachers, students, higher education faculty, CESAs, parents, professional associations, and business community partners now use the CCSS every day to transform education around a shared goal of postsecondary and workforce readiness. The CCSS are more

rigorous, and provide a common foundation to ensure every Wisconsin child is a graduate ready for college and career.